DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 354 753 FL 020 951

AUTHOR Green, Christopher
TITLE Typological Transfer, Discourse Accent and the Chinese Writer of English.
REPORT NO ISSN-1015-2059
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 14p.; For the serial issue from which this paper is analyzed, see FL 020 947.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT Hongkong Papers in Linguistics and Language Teaching; v14 p51-63 1991

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cantonese; Chinese; Discourse Analysis; *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; *Interlanguage; Language Research; *Language Styles; Linguistic Theory; Oral Language; Second Language Learning; *Transfer of Training; *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS Discourse Accent

ABSTRACT

The notion that acquisition of a second language may be influenced by transfer of typological features from the first language is discussed, focusing on the role of topic-prominence in the interlanguage stages of a native Cantonese-speaker learning English. First, the topic-prominent surface structure manifestations in oral Cantonese are examined. A theoretical basis for this type of transfer is then outlined, noting the conditions required in each language, and the situation of marked variants is discussed. Subsequently, a small study using 50 mature, high proficiency students as subjects is described. In it, topicalized structures in English were elicited in a brief writing assignment and analyzed for topic-prominent structures, discourse accent, topic- and theme-driven discourse structure, and patterns in given-new information. Observations are made in each area. A number of areas for further research are identified. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

HONGKONG PAPERS IN LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE TEACHING 14 (1991) ISSN 1015-2059

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

TYPOLOGICAL TRANSFER, DISCOURSE ACCENT AND THE CHINESE WRITER OF ENGLISH

Christopher Green
Institute of Language in Education, Hong Kong

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED354753

Introduction

In recent years, interlanguage studies have been characterised by a concern to formulate and test hypotheses of a universal order of second language acquisition (SLA). This exciting and exacting preoccupation has led to a de-emphasising of the influence of the native language (NL) on the acquisition of a target language (TL). However, as Rutherford (1983) argues, there is no reason to suppose that notions of a universal order of acquisition exclude consideration of the proposal that TL acquisition may be shaped, coloured and accented in varying degrees by the transfer of typological features from NL.

This realisation has prompted investigation into a wide range of crosslinguistic influences. Gundel and Tarone's (1983) psycholinguistic exploration of the acquisition of a feature of English discourse cohesion (pronominal anaphora) by Chinese and Spanish students is illustrative of this trend. Odlin's (1989) enquiry, sociolinguistic in orientation, evaluates the evidence for the transfer of politeness conventions in the interpersonal communication of German learners of English. Trevise's (1986) examination of the evidence supporting the notion that French is in the process of becoming topic-prominent in terms of an information-oriented ordering of syntactic constituents is entirely relevant to the concerns of this paper.

It is worth noting that investigations into this kind of transfer complement rather than attempt to invalidate or replace a more traditional, parts-focussed contrastive analysis. Wong (1988) has argued strongly that, at sentence level, many examples of language production perceived as demonstrating typological influence many be accounted for in terms of incomplete mastery of TL morpho-syntactic systems. Two aspects of the same acquisition problem are perhaps in evidence here. The native speakers of a topic-prominent (t-p) language, and indeed t-p languages themselves tend to have reduced grammatical systems, may be predisposed to transfer this prominence and, at the same time, to have a great deal of work to do in acquiring the grammaticisation demanded by a subject-prominent TL. The point surely is that both processes are at work simultaneously and do not stand in mutual contradiction or exclusion.

However, Wong does not deny the possible existence of typological transfer, and one way out of this impasse is to investigate the possible influence of fossilised typological manifestations on the accent of longer stretches of discourse, since at the interface of segmental and pragmatic comparisons of NL and TL is the ordering of sentence constituents as information-bearers. The present study then is located at that interface: a location which Halliday (1985: xvii) appears to view as an essential point of departure for the principled analysis of discourse:

> A text is a semantic unit, not a grammatical one. But meanings are realised through wordings; and without a theory of wordings - that is, a grammar - there is no way of making explicit one's interpretation of the meaning of a text.

Halliday (op.cit.: xxii) again:

> A text is meaningful because it is an actualisation of the potential that

FL 020 951

2

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> constitutes the linguistic system; it is for this reason that the study of discourse (text linguistics) cannot properly be separated from the study of the grammar that lies behind it.

My main interest is enquiring into topic-prominence in Cantonese interlanguage stages of English. This is so because word ordering concerns are naturally subsumed under an enquiry into the operations of topic. I take it as axiomatic that topic-prominence is conceived in the psychological deep structure, that topic bears information which provides a frame of reference for the written discourse in which it appears (that is until another topic is selected as the discourse develops) and with Thompson (1978) that ordering of syntactic constituents is the surface structure realisation of topic-prominence. First however it is necessary to examine Cantonese typologically for topic-prominent surface structure manifestations to adduce evidence to support these initial claims.

Surface Structure Parameters of Topic-Prominence derived from Spoken Cantonese

1. Absence of the empty-subject place-holders required to preserve grammatical word order in English, "there is" and "it is":

   好熱！

   Very hot!
   It's hot!

2. Appearance of "heavy" double subjects where the first (locative or temporal adverbial) subject functions as topic in the information structure:

   中國大陸嘅人居住環境好差。

   China mainland people living conditions very poor.
   People in mainland China live in very poor conditions.

3. Topic, not grammatical subject, controls redundant co-referential pronoun deletion:

   佢姐姐煮嗰啲炒飯好差所以我冇食。

   His sister cook that fried rice very badly so I not eat.
   His sister prepared the fried rice very badly so I did not eat it.

4. Topic takes a predicate but this is not necessarily a verb as in English. Thus, "serial" verbs occur with no proximal subjects. At certain interlanguage stages this lack of subject is compensated for by the use of sentence-initial existential "there is/are":

   有好多人想移民。

   Have many people want emigrate.
   *There are many people want to emigrate.
   Many people want to emigrate.

Generally speaking Chinese verbs are not oriented to the explication of actor-object relations which is, of course, their primary function in English.

5. Relatively free choice as to the constituent selected as topic. English too tolerates some choice but then questions of marked and unmarked language use come into play. This point is picked up and amplified later.

6. The premodification of head noun by constituents which would be embedded in English:

住喺大城市嘅美國人多數好窮。

Live in big cities America people often very poor.
American people living in big cities are often poor.

7. Early and prominent (sentence-initial) announcement of topic as a frame of reference for the ensuing discourse:

老板個房喺邊？

Boss's office is where?
Where is the boss's office?

嗰件事我係負責人。

That matter I am responsible person.
I am in charge of that matter.

8. Marginalisation of the use of the passive construction. Interlanguage samples which appear to be failed attempts to use the passive in English may in fact be interpreted as topic-comment formulations:

Topic *Comment*
Film in Hong Kong,/can buy very cheap.
One can buy film in Hong Kong very cheaply.
*Film in Hong Kong can be bought very cheaply.

The relatively rare appearance of passives in Chinese is perhaps not surprising. As a naturally topic-prominent language it has no need of a transformation which is used to foreground the objective information focus of a particular sentence in subject-prominent languages. Zhou and Feng (1983) provide evidence for the corollary of this; that only a small number of English passive constructions may be translated directly into Chinese.

There is a real need to carry out research in this area of Chinese-English interlanguage, since Cantonese learners, as distinct from Mandarin NL subjects, have received little attention in terms oftypological analyses of their TL production. Exceptions to this are Leung (1987) and Sung (forthcoming, 1991). There is, of course, good reason for the a priori assumption that Cantonese learners will produce similar results to Mandarin subjects since the major dialects of Chinese share a similar written code and major linguistic systems, but this assumption should not go unanalysed or untested, particularly in view of the fact that, in the Hong Kong context, students have to operate in Cantonese, written Modern Standard Chinese and English. The interflow of crosslinguistic influences

is complex and subtle, and it may be difficult to trace associated transfer features accurately to source. The diglossic situation just described with regard to Modern Standard Chinese and Cantonese makes it all the more important to emphasise that this paper is primarily concerned with Cantonese subjects, and is underpinned by the belief that these subjects frame their written English output broadly in accordance with the norms of spoken Cantonese.

The most severe linguistic trials of the Cantonese learner of English may revolve, then, around the central issue of perceiving and successfully producing the intricate subject-predicate frameworks needed to carry and develop thematic information in English. However, transfer of topic-prominence to English cannot be assumed unless the necessary and sufficient conditions discussed below are fulfilled.

A Theoretical Basis

1. NL and TL must be similar, to some crucial extent,in the possibilities available for the ordering of sentential constituents. If the possibilities for word order are radically different then transfer is much less likely to occur.

2. A feature available for potential transfer is likely to be an unmarked option in the surface coding of NL, and is transferable to TL via:

   a) the learner's increasing, but intuitive and tacit, awareness of this NL feature.

   b) the learner's simultaneous lack of awareness of the marked and unmarked option possibilities and restrictions this feature possesses in the TL.

These conditions are similar to those proposed by Jordens and Kellerman (1981) and are in broad concurrence with Meisel's view (1981) that the clearest-cut evidence for NL influence on TL production is to be found in word order, since this phenomenon is so rarely transferred in its entirety. 2b is my own formulation. Some elaboration might be helpful in explaining these conditions. With regard to 1, for example, native speakers of Japanese, a prototypically SOV language, apparently never transfer verb-final ordering to SVO English (Rutherford op. cit). For transfer to take place there must be a degree of what might be termed "apparency" through which a syntactic feature of NL is felt to be sufficiently close to TL norms as to justify logical mapping. In terms of word order, Cantonese is an SVO language, but not as rigidly so as English, since it appears to allow pragmatic and information-imparting protocols to predominate over formal syntactic concerns. This syntactic flexibility allows discourse topic to be emphasised over grammatical subject. A degree of propositional explicitness is present which English muffles under a dense layer of grammaticisation. Hawkins comparing English and German syntax (1980, and quoted in Rutherford) had this to say:

> English speakers have, in effect, more work to do in extracting meaning from form. They must systematically exclude contextually inappropriate interpretations from ambiguous and semantically diverse surface structures; they must reconstruct semantic argument-predicate relations over often large syntactic domains; and they must infer semantically relevant material which is not present in surface form.

This argument recurs as the discussion of the whole subject develops. However, the point which needs to be made clear here is that Cantonese and English fulfil the first condition for transferability of word order form NL to TL, that of apparent similarity of word order.

The second condition relates to the SLA stage at which learners become increasingly aware of typological features of NL, but not of the possibilities and restrictions that exist for these features in TL. It is reasonably safe to assume with Sung (op.cit) that Cantonese, like Mandarin, is located on the language typology continuum rather closer to the pragmatic word order (PWO) end, while English occupies a position very close to the grammatical word order (GWO) extreme. A PWO language is so oriented as to allow the communicational imperatives of imparting information and providing clarity of reference to dominate word order norms. In sharp contrast to this, GWO languages require fairly rigid adherence to syntactic norms, even to the extent that semantically-empty place-holders are used to retain fundamental syntax, no matter what the discoursal and pragmatic requirements of the context.

Markedness

To this point, I have been referring to unmarked language options. Once marked variants are considered (in English, samples not having grammatical subject in thematic sentence-initial position) the contrast referred to begins to assume the quality of deceptive apparency that is a necessary precondition for transfer. Now, PWO I take to be an unmarked option for word ordering in Cantonese and, in concurrence with the second condition above, this ordering is available for transfer to TL when and as learners become increasingly aware of it as a basic shaping feature of their NL. Learners then transfer the feature, more or less overtly or covertly depending on level of proficiency, to a GWO TL which either does not tolerate the feature (in which case a gross error is clearly in evidence) or has the feature as a marked option (the manifestation may then be grammatically-sound but "odd" or "strong" in tone to the TL native speaker). In the latter case, the learner has strayed into marked TL language use, because of the retention of PWO from NL. Higher proficiency learners seem to utilise a range of devices to accomplish this retention, perhaps consciously to avoid jarringly basilectal TL output. The following authentic samples, taken from the academic writing of young adult post-intermediate level students studying English as part of a programme of vocational training, illustrate this point:

Device *Defined Topic* *Comment*

1. **For/those staff who acted as senior ones**,/they earn more salary.

Device *Defined Topic* *Comment*

2. **According to/our calculations on this matter**,/it shows that we will have lack of time.

Device *Defined Topic*

3. **Concerning/our academic report belong to vocational studies**,/

Comment

it must be written up carefully and well presented.

In these examples the early and emphatic (marked) appearance of topic is followed by, in information structure terms, a comment on it. That the sentences above are conceived in topic-comment terms is supported by the precise placement of a comma at the topic-comment boundary, and by the undeleted co-referential pronoun which picks up and reinforces the intra-sentential influence of the topic.

Topicalisation then is a psychological entity manifested by the wording chosen to realise its primary role in Cantonese, that is as a point of departure or reference for the ensuing discourse. Lower proficiency learners by contrast, tend to produce TL language samples which are largely stripped of any attempt to mask the topicalising influence of the NL. Their TL production, as one would expect, is closer to NL norms and, in particular, the exophorically-oriented norms of spoken NL:

Topic *Comment*
Hong Kong's complicated traffic problem,/it will need many people to solve.

It is rarely possible to account for the overall "oddness" of much of the writing produced by Cantonese learners in terms of the sum total of low-level lexicostructural errors present in particular texts. However, taking the point of departure for contrastive analysis at the macrostructural level of whole text presents problems too. Kaplan's pioneering (1966) hypothesis of the transfer of non-linear rhetorical organisation to a discourse-linear TL by Chinese learners of English takes as its point of departure the comparison of the Anglo-American academic essay and the classical Chinese composition. Kaplan detected digressive circularity and frequent occurences of tangential viewpoint in the English writing of Chinese subjects which he assumed was transferred from NL writing and reflected "oriental" patterns of thought.

More recently Malcolm and Hongjio (1988) have produced empirical data which seems to suggest that English native-speaker writers of expository compositions follow the linear process of structural development **Situation--Problem--Solution--Evaluation**, while Chinese writers of English in the same genre might sometimes use the NL pattern **Thesis--Development of Thesis--Contrast to Thesis--Indefinite Conclusion**. Despite the obvious interest of this line of enquiry it is not of direct relevance to the concerns of the present study. It is also important to make clear that the research findings available were all extremely tentative, and that the "oriental" thought patterns detected in samples of English writing may in fact be ascribed more accurately to developmental rather than transfer influences (Mohan and Lo, 1985).

To return to matters of direct concern, English does, of course, allow topicalisation to occur in marked information structure. As an alternative to unmarked forms such as:

Subject *Predicate*
Tony/likes Smith's ideas on education.

One might find marked object fronting:

Topic *Comment*
With regard to education,/Tony likes Smith's ideas.

Or participant as topic:

Topic *Comment*
As for Tony,/he likes Smith's ideas on education.

However, such marked constructions lose their emphatic quality when a writer overproduces them. For this reason these constructions are comparatively infrequent in native-speaker written production. My assumption, again in line with the second condition above, is that Cantonese learners become aware of the PWO (topicalising) nature of their NL but not that this constitutes restricted marked usage in a fundamentally GWO language like English.

Elicitation Procedure

I decided to carry out a small-scale procedure to elicit the production of topicalised structures in the English of mature, high proficiency students. I targeted this group since I wanted to ensure a relative paucity of the surface lexicogrammatical errors that can make detection of transferred discourse phenomena so opaque and indeterminate.

Using the Oxford Placement (Structure) Test Parts 3B1 and 3B2 (Allan, 1985) I selected the fifty highest-scoring students from one hundred and thirty to take part in the elicitation activity. A

word is in order about the test instrument in that extensive trialling in my institute has shown that OPT 3 discriminates far more effectively among Cantonese native-speaker subjects than the other structure tests in that series. The students selected all scored 160 or above in the test. This correlates to upper-intermediate to advanced status in terms of international measures of language proficiency in English.

I then set a short writing task entitled "How the changing roles of husbands and wives is affecting marriage and the family in Asia"; a propositionally rich and syntactically complex topic. My intention was to elicit only a few lines of unmonitored and uncorrected TL production from each student, so a time limit of just 10 minutes was imposed.

Findings and Discussion

There was no occurrence of structures that could be construed as "putative passives", or of incorrect co-referential pronoun deletion, heavy double subjects or extensive premodification of head noun. However, there were occurences of very emphatic topic announcement through the overt fronting of objective information; the so-called "Ross-topicalisation" (cited in Barry, 1975: 8) and subjects did avail themselves of a relative free choice in the selection of the constituent identified as topic. Interestingly, the corpus contained nine existential + serial verbs constructions. Most higher proficiency learners had clearly passed through the SLA stage at which TL production is characterised by gross NL influence, but it does seem that, lacking the empty subject in NL, even the subjects under consideration were hypersensitive to this contrasting TL feature and overcompensated by using the existential + serial verbs construction unnecessarily. The sample below is taken from the corpus:

> There are many young and educated Asian women nowadays want to marry but cannot because they lack suitable partners to select.

The difficulty in attribution of topic-prominence at high levels of proficiency is highlighted by this example. It could be claimed that the student has simply failed to supply the subject co-referential pronoun "who" to lead the embedding of the subsequent defining clause; the incomplete mastery of TL systems argument. However, I tend to favour the interpretation that the sentence was conceived in topic-prominent terms; the extended topic here, as with all topics, controls co-referential pronoun deletion. Indeed, the non-appearance of the pronoun many be interpreted as a typologically-induced failure to conform to subject-predicate norms; the relative pronoun here being needed to fill the grammatical subject slot to take second predicate "want". This interpretation considers the observed wording as the surface structure manifestation of language conceived primarily in terms of topic-prominence.

To return to the data, apart from the nine sentences mentioned above, a further twenty-eight sentences were analysable as topic-prominent in construction; together these sentences represented about 18% of the data. Most in the latter group were, as already indicated, examples of "Ross-topicalisation". A number of these are displayed and discussed below:

> Concerning the family, it will benefit from the changing roles. It will be enhanced by the husbands' new role of child rearing aid. It is because previously the husband gave no aid.

The device used here to herald the topic, is a direct translation of Chinese 關於 . A topic-prominent language clearly has need of such introductory, defining devices, but in marked English information structure "as for ..." or "with regard to..." or "on the subject of..." etc are the acceptable forms. Sentence-initial use of "concerning" in a left-dislocated topic in English is nearly always used to refer to something known to all participants in the discourse and the whole topic construction is often followed by grammatical subject to restore SVO ordering as rapidly as possible:

Concerning the trip to Paris, I was wondering if we could cancel it.

The unmarked word order option would, of course, give sentence-initial prominence to grammatical subject with the information focus falling on the object complement.

I was wondering if we could cancel that trip to Paris.

The three semantic units available for selection as topic in the title viz. changing roles of husbands and wives, marriage, and family were in fact all topicalised in the data. The student below chose changing roles to begin the piece:

> Change in the roles of the genders, it has come about due to many external factors. It is because nowadays both partners must go out to work and therefore have the same responsibilities in the house.

Not only is the topic announced emphatically, but the topic-related pronoun picks up, reinforces and carries the topicalised constituent through the discourse. The second (sentence-initial) pronoun may be taken as evidence of the inter-sentential potential of topic. It is worth reiterating the fact that this type of topicalisation in TL always involves the precise placement of a comma at the topic-comment boundary; a surface representation of the deep structure process in operation.

The following example is a very sophisticated one, combining notions of both marriage and professional desires in contrast:

> For many people who wish to get married but who also wish to fulfill professional ambitions in a wider context, they must develop a wide range of domestic and occupational skills as well as possess unlimited energy!

The sentence stands first in the piece of writing and demonstrates a very impressive degree of control and embedding, but all within a "softened" version of the topic-comment framework retained from NL. A final example of the deep-structure conception of topic and its pervasiveness even at higher levels of proficiency is given below:

> According to research evidence, it shows that more Asian couples are getting divorced nowadays.

The frame of reference "my research" holds an importance and influence over the discourse that it does not possess in the native-speaker options displayed below:

> According to my research, more Asian couples are getting divorced nowadays.

or

> More Asian couples are getting divorced nowadays according to my research.

or

> My research shows that more Asian couples are getting divorced nowadays.

Discourse Accent

It can be argued, then, that in the examples information is being processed and presented in a manner very different from the way a native speaker would carry out these operations. Chinese discourse frames seem to be intruding into English syntax and the effect is both powerful and puzzling, since often, but by no means always, the TL used is ordered in a syntactically marked way and, as such, breaks the given-new contract underlying English information structure. If enough marked "contract-breaking" topicalisations are present in the text, the impression conveyed to the native-speaker reader of English will be of disjointed and fragmented development of the messages embodied in the discourse.

The quality of staccato "horizontal listing" which pervades a good deal of the written English discourse produced by Cantonese learners could be related to topicalisation and the naturally co-occuring lack of embedded thematic elements, and concomitant non-appearance of adequate cohesive ties. This is not surprising if, in the deep structure, the learner conceives his TL surface coding in a topic-prominent manner. In a topic-prominent NL, a topic stands at the head of the discourse and the ensuing discourse is taken by the producer and the receiver to be related to it until a new topical referent is introduced. Subject-prominent languages like English, however, undergo a complex, involuted process of textualisation to achieve a tightly-spun, almost opaque surface structure. Discourse ties are usually representational and non-repetitive and so are very different in kind from the over-explicit and seemingly illogical (in English) use of certain transferred semantic markers commonly found in the writing of Chinese students. Consider in particular, [illegible] and 另一方面 (translated inaccurately as "moreover" and "besides" respectively in many Chinese-English dictionaries) which stand at the head of a paragraph in Chinese and predetermine the topical range of the paragraph content. A tentative claim may be advanced that semantic markers are topical and explicit in Chinese whereas English, particularly in written mode, demands conformity to a code of implicit internal coherence and cohesion.

Topic and Theme

Halliday (op.cit.) has demonstrated convincingly that English information structure is theme, and not topic, driven. There are many different kinds of theme but all appear in sentence initial position. Among these thematic variants is topical theme; often a simple, one-part device using subject, complement or adjunct to convey ideational information:

Topical Theme *Rheme*
Marriage / cannot remain the same in Asia.

More complex themes are the norm, however, in English once the frame of reference has been established. These typically deliver interpersonal and textual components to express viewpoint and form cohesive links within the discourse.

Complex Theme *Rheme*
I doubt very much whether marriage in Asia/can remain the same.

Given-New

In both examples above the Given-New contract is retained intact, but the topical themes found in Chinese, if transferred to English, always have the potential to suddenly introduce a new point of departure or frame of reference in a non-anaphoric way.

That said, whether the Given-New contract is broken or not depends on the position in the context at which a new topic is announced. Clearly if new referents introduce a focus of information not recoverable from the foregoing text, then the Given-New sequence will be reversed. The examples given so far from the experimental corpus do meet English Given-New expectations, because in each case the topic necessarily relates back to the title of the piece of writing. An example from the corpus that does break these expectations is this sentence which began a new paragraph immediately following on from a paragraph of discussion on the Asian woman's relative lack of freedom in the choosing of a husband:

Topic/New
For the Western women's concept of freedom,

Comment/Given
it can allow them to make their own decisions who to marry.

Rhetorically, expressing such a contrast often requires breaking Given-New expectations to deliver the necessary sharp comparison with the preceding topic. However, Chinese writers in English tend to break the contract rather too frequently and probably unintentionally, conferring qualities of suddeness, overemphasis and perhaps incoherence to the text.

Topics, including the extended, defined types already exemplified, are able to stand independent of, or absorb to a limited extent, other syntactic components. Complex themes in English, however, tend to aggregate other components together and assign overall primacy to the subject-verb arguments they subsume. Thematisation itself has cohesive, as well as expressive properties in that it provides a mode of binding ideational, interpersonal and textual elements tightly together. In so doing the information to be conveyed is made more implicit. Topic, in contrast, requires fewer components and ties in its composition since it has the function of making points of reference and ideational information focii immediately explicit.

Interestingly the elicited corpus revealed evidence of reduced textual and interpersonal material. Expression of subjective viewpoint, for example, was remarkably infrequent and thus most texts conveyed an overall sense of depersonalisation. I am not putting forward a Whorfian reductionist view that topicalisation and its associated simplification of thematic structure in English is the primary cause of this. It is perhaps more likely that this suppression of personal engagement in the world view is induced by historical patterns of cultural behaviour (Bond, 1986: 85) and that appropriate language devices evolved simply to convey rather than in any way determine, cultural thought patterns.

Directions for Future Research

It hardly needs to be pointed out how preliminary the investigations reported here are. The richness and complexity of this area of enquiry mean that any statements or findings must necessarily be treated as tentative and incomplete; the more so when the very small-scale nature of the empirical study carried out is recalled. Such a preliminary enquiry is bound to raise more questions than it can hope to satisfactorily address. Certainly most of the key issues remain unresolved. The following list might offer useful suggestions for directions of future research. Lines of enquiry might include:

- How the different properties of subject and topic might affect morphemic grammatical accuracy. For example, subject-verb agreement.

- Convergencies and divergencies of topic and theme, and differences in accent between topic-driven and theme-driven discourse.

- How a newly-introduced topic in context can break the given-new contract in English; in particular the effective range of this dislocation requires careful study.

- The use of pronominal anaphora by Chinese learners of English and its link to topic-comment organisation. In particular, the use of representational "it" rather than demonstrative "this " in the reference cohesion system of English.

- The connections between notions of markedness in written Chinese and English. A systematic analysis and comparison to detect similarities and differences might well shed a great deal of light on the interlanguage of Chinese learners of English. It might also be interesting, as a corollary to much of the discussion above, to seek evidence for the possible effects of English typological organisation on the Modern Standard Chinese writing of Cantonese users of English.

- The development of reference and instructional materials based on the principles of contrastive information structure and rhetoric to raise learner awareness of the problem. As Li and Thompson (1976) have made clear, existing reference materials have limitations:

  ...it is often difficult to determine the typology of a language ... on the basis of reference grammars since such grammars are biased towards the subject-predicate analysis.

Pedagogical approaches might profitably focus on contrastive consciousness-raising activities, initially at sentence level, since this is the starting point for the meaningful organisation of information. In the Hong Kong context this is important since many learners, even those at tertiary level, are unable to produce complex sentences with complete clausal embedding and intra-sentential cohesion. Work could then proceed to the higher levels of text macrostructure. This process would afford the ideal opportunity for fruitful co-operation between native and non-native teachers of English.

This paper has attempted to adduce some initial evidence for the crosslinguistic influence of topic at intrasentential, intersentential and paragraph levels in the written production of Cantonese learners and users of English. The importance of investigating the SLA tendencies of all dialectal groups of Chinese learners of English cannot be overstated. Chinese people constitute more than a quarter of the world's population, and the very strong interest they show in learning English as a first foreign language means that key issues need to be resolved urgently to facilitate effective teaching and learning. Language typology and the effects of its transfer on written English may be one of these key issues.

Acknowledgements

My thanks are due to Barbara Chan of the Institute of Language in Education for responding so patiently to my questions on Chinese linguistics and for supplying the characters in the language examples, and to Lily Leung of the University of Hong Kong, Language Centre for her detailed and very constructive comments on the first draft of the paper. Any omissions, incorrect inclusions or misconceptions remain, of course, entirely my own responsibility.

NOTES

1. By "discourse accent" I refer to characteristically non-native patterns of discourse organisation; for a more comprehensive account, see Scarcella (1983).

REFERENCES

Allan, D. 1985. *Oxford Placement Test Parts 3B1 and 3B2*. Oxford University Press.

Barry, R. 1975. 'Topic in Grossman'. In R. E. et. al. (eds.) *Chinese: An Overlap of Meaning, Grammar and Discourse Function*. Papers from the Parasession on Functionalism, pp. 1-9, Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.

Bond, M. H. 1986. *The Psychology of the Chinese People*, pp. 84-87, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.

Gass, S. and Selinker, L. (eds.) 1983. *Language Transfer in Language Learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Gundel, J. and Tarone, E. 1983. In Gass and Selinker (eds.) *Language Transfer and the Acquisition of Pronominal Anaphora*, pp. 281-297.

Halliday, M. A. K. 1985. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.

Hawkins, J. 1980. 'On the theoretical significance of English/German syntactic contrasts'. Paper presented at the International Seminar on Contrastive English/German Grammar. California: Stanford University.

Jordens, P. and Kellerman, E. 1981. 'Investigation into the Transfer Strategy in Second Language Learning'. In Savard, J. and Laforge, L. (eds.) 1981, *Actes du 5e Congres de l'AILA*, pp. 195-215, Quebec: Les Presses de l'Universite de Laval.

Kaplan, R. B. 1966. Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education. *Language Learning* 16: 1-20.

Leung, W. K. 1987. 'How can the Monitor Monitor? The Contrastive Hypothesis Revisited'. In Bickley, V. C. (ed.) *Languages in Education in a Bi-Lingual or Multilingual Setting*. 1987. pp. 99-107, Education Department Publication: Hong Kong Government Printer.

Li, C. and Thompson, S. 1976. 'Subject and Topic: A New Typology of Language'. In Li, C. (ed.) 1976. *Subject and Topic*. New York: Academic Press.

Malcolm, I. and Hongjio, P. 1988. 'Argumentation Patterns in Contemporary Chinese: Implications for English Teaching'. In Bickley, V. C. (ed.) *Language Teaching and Learning Styles Within and Across Cultures*. 1989. pp. 321-333, Education Department Publication: Hong Kong government Printer.

Meisel, J. M. 1981. 'The Role of Transfer as a Strategy of Natural Second Language Acquisition/Processing'. Paper presented at the first Eunam Workshop on Crosslinguistic Second Language Acquisition Research, Lake Arrowhead.

Mohan, B. A. and Lo, W. A. 1985. 'Academic writing and Chinese Students: Transfer and Developmental Factors'. *TESOL Quarterly* 19/3: 515-534.

Odlin, T. 1989. *Language Transfer*. pp. 48-70, Cambridge University Press.

Rutherford, W. E. 1983. In Gass and Selinker (eds.) *Language Typology and Language Transfer*, pp. 358-70.

Scarcella, R. C. 1983. In Gass and Selinker (eds.) *Discourse Accent in Second Language Performance*. pp. 306-326.

Sung, W. M. (forthcoming 1991). 'Typological Transfer: A Factor in the Learner Language of Hong Kong Students?' In Green, C. F. and Bunton, D. (eds.) *English Usage in Hong Kong. Institute of Language in Education Journal Special Issue No.2*. Education Department Publication: Hong Kong Government Printer.

Thompson, S. 1978. 'Modern English from a typological point of view: Some implications of the function of word order'. *Linguistische Berichte* 54: 19-35.

Trevise, A. 1986. 'Is it Transferable-Topicalisation?' In Kellerman, E. and Sharwood-Smith, M. (eds) 1986. *Crosslinguistic Influences in Second Language Acquisition*. pp. 186-206, Pergamon.

Wong, S. L. 1988. 'What we do and don't know about Chinese learners of English: A Critical Review of Selected Research'. *RELC Journal* 19/1: 16-36.

Zhou Z. P. and Feng, W. C. 1983. 'Comparison between Chinese and English Passive Sentences and Discussion on Methods of Translation'. *Language Learning and Communication* 2/3: 309-321.